

**Oyster Task Force Meeting
Tuesday, April 7, 2026 10:00am
New Orleans Lakefront Airport
6001 Stars and Stripes Blvd.
New Orleans, LA**

I. Pledge of Allegiance

II. Roll call and introduction of guests

Voting Members Present:

Mitch Jurisich
Brad Robin
Brandt Lafrance
Al Sunseri
Jakov Jurisic
Shane Bagala
Willie Daisy

Voting Members Absent:

Peter Vujnovich
Sam Slavich
Matthew Slavich
Brandon Debarge
Steve Pollock

Non-Voting Members Present:

Robert Caballero
Major Davis Madere
Kyle Balkum

Non-Voting Members Absent:

Brian Lezina
Bryan Wallace

III. Approval of March 3, 2026 Meeting Minutes and the April 7, 2026 Agenda

Brad Robin motioned to approve the March 3, 2026 meeting minutes, 2nd by Willie Daisy. Motion carries.

Brad Robin motioned to amend the April 7, 2026 meeting agenda to add item G. To discuss appointing a member from the Louisiana Oyster Dealers and Growers Association to the OTF, 2nd by Shane Bagala. Motion carries.

IV. Treasury Report

Remaining Fund Balance- \$ 546,739
Remaining Budget Balance- \$ 22,701

Brad Robin motioned to accept the treasury report as presented, 2nd by Brandt Lafrance. Motion carries.

V. Committee Reports

A. Public and Private Oyster Grounds Committee - No Report

B. Enforcement - Lt. Joey Thompson provided the enforcement report

February 9th – March 23rd 2026

Region 6

Terrebonne

3 – Take oysters without oyster harvester license

Seizures: 15 sacks of oysters seized and returned to water

Region 8

St. Bernard

1- Violate sanitation code (no waste bucket)

2- Violate sanitation code (log book)

1- Violate sanitation code (refrigeration)

Seizures: 41 Sacks of Oysters seized and returned to water.

Plaquemines:

1 –Violate sanitation code (no waste bucket)

1 - Violate sanitation code (no boat numbers on top)

C. Legislative - No Report

D. Legal - No Report

E. Research - No Report

F. Coastal Restoration

Captain George Ricks stated that the Caernarvon Diversion is running at a minimum and the river is at 6.4 ft. and slightly on the rise. The Davis Pond Diversion is running at 4,000 cfs and the salinity at Bay Dos Gris is 12 ppt. The salinity at Snake Island is 5.5 ppt so the Caernarvon Diversion is barely allowed to operate.

Mitch Jurisich stated that shrimp season is usually when they terminate operations.

Jakov Jurisic stated that Madi Gras Pass is already open and does not see the point in opening elsewhere.

Captain George Ricks stated that funding allows them to do a pulse on it once a year.

G. Marketing

Mitch Jurisich stated that marketing was looking at buying beads with the oyster logo on them for promotional purposes. Mitch Jurisich stated that it would be better to buy the beads early so they have them when they are needed.

Jakov Jurisic stated the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board is not holding regular meetings and asked when they will hold their next meeting.

Mitch Jurisich stated that they should at least hold quarterly meetings.

Jakov Jurisic stated he will look into it and report back to the OTF.

H. Health

Jennifer Armentor introduced Gregory Richard as the new LDH Director of Sanitarian Services. Jennifer Armentor stated that Brian Warren, LDH Chief Sanitarian, is also present at the OTF meeting. Jennifer Armentor discussed the role that LDH played in this most recent LOOP oil spill. Jennifer Armentor stated that LDH was responsible for closing oyster harvesting areas and reopening them after testing. Jennifer Armentor stated that the spill originated offshore and winds and tides moved oil into inshore marsh. Jennifer Armentor stated that booms were containing the oil spill in non-oyster harvester areas but winds and tides again allowed the oil to infiltrate oyster grounds. Jennifer Armentor stated that as soon as oil was seen in oyster harvesting areas a shutdown was issued.

Jennifer Armentor stated that multiple oyster samples were dredged from closed areas for testing. Jennifer Armentor stated LDWF collected samples of finfish, shrimp and crab for further testing as well. Jennifer Armentor stated 66 samples were submitted to Eurofins for oil detection and the results indicated that all samples either had no oil present or not enough to be detectable. Jennifer Armentor stated that after testing concluded all oyster harvest areas were reopened on Friday April 3rd 2026.

Al Sunseri asked if any samples were taken from Sister Lake.

Jennifer Armentor stated that she is unsure if samples were taken from Sister Lake specifically but samples were taken in its harvest area.

Al Sunseri stated that Sister Lake could be reopened later this year, if it is not going to be open next year. Al Sunseri asked when the last oyster sample was taken.

Jennifer Armentor stated the last sample was taken on March 29th from Bayou Sevin in oyster harvester area 15. Jennifer Armentor stated that samples were taken at this location because there was a presence of an oil sheen at the site. Jennifer Armentor stated that not all areas sampled had an oil sheen during sampling so Bayou Sevin was a good indicator if oil was contaminating the oysters.

Jakov Jurisic asked if any oil dispersants were used.

Jennifer Armentor stated no dispersants were used inshore because the EPA only allows the use of dispersant offshore. Jennifer Armentor stated that since the spill moved inshore booms and manual

labor were used to control the spill. Jennifer Armentor stated that the oil spill occurred when imported Venezuelan oil was mishandled during unloading from a tanker. Jennifer Armentor stated that 750 barrels of oil were released. Jennifer Armentor stated that Venezuelan oil is extra dense and thicker than Louisiana crude oil.

I. Aquaculture – No Report

J. Joint Task Force Working Group

Jakov Jurisic asked if the Joint Task Force could convene to discuss imported oysters.

Mitch Jurisich suggested having a meeting with Westbank Fishing or the United Commercial Fisherman's Association.

Jakov Jurisic suggested meeting with other oyster producing states around the Gulf Coast on this issue.

VI. New Business

A. To Hear a Presentation on Ocean Acidification and Its Effects on Shellfish- SDMI

Tegan Hanson stated that she and her colleague Stuart Nolan are from the Stephen Disaster Management Institution (SDMI) and were here to discuss their research on Ocean Acidification. Tegan Hanson stated their main objective is to develop informative workshops based on interviews with fisherman, nonprofits, and government officials to see what they know about ocean acidification.

Tegan Hanson stated that acidification affects the shells of oysters, crab, and shrimp to a lesser degree but mainly affects oyster since they are stationary. Tegan Hanson stated that areas such as Maine in Northeast US and the North Sea in the UK are experiencing problems with ocean acidification. Tegan Hanson stated that input from industries affected will help NOAA in combating ocean acidification and improve oyster's resilience.

Mitch Jurisich stated that cultch sees better propagation than natural oyster reefs which could be suffering from ocean acidification.

Tegan Hanson stated that they want to understand the problems fisherman are facing so they can work on a solution.

Brad Robin ask if samples are being collected.

Tegan Hanson stated no samples are being collected this point because they are just working on information collection, but it will be followed up by research.

Al Sunseri stated that the researchers should get in contact with Bob Rheault of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association and Bill Dewey of the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association.

Jakov Jurisic asked if there is a connection between spillways and ocean acidification.

Tegan Hanson stated that there is because of an excess of carbon dioxide in water which causes ocean acidification.

Jakov Jurisic stated that near Half Moon Island in Lake Borgne, there is some signs of recruitment on oyster shells. Jakov Jurisic asked if the shells in that area were pre or post BP oil spill shells. Jakov Jurisic stated that they were probably post because in 2013 LDWF planted the shell plant near Half Moon which was inhibited by the Bonnet Carré Spillway. Jakov Jurisic asked if the oyster are attaching themselves to the new shells rather than the old ones affected by the spillway.

Tegan Hanson stated that a workshop will take place in mid-June possibly June 17th once they conduct interviews and surveys to develop the program based on what people need.

Stuart Nolan stated that he has conducted 12 interviews and 25 surveys so far in preparation for the workshop.

B. To Discuss the LOOP Oil Spill Damages and Economic Impacts – OTF

Mitch Jurisich stated that 750 barrels of oil were spilled but believes the total could be higher than reported. Mitch Jurisich stated that cleanup is still on going in areas affected. Mitch Jurisich stated shrimpers are seeing oil in their nets of shrimp so crude oil could be on the bottom of the sea floor. Mitch Jurisich stated that the thickness of Venezuelan crude makes it harder to clean up. Mitch Jurisich stated that no dispersants were used and that oil on the shoreline will have to be manually dug up and remediated elsewhere.

Robert Caballero stated that LDWF found oil spots in Lake Pelto and Caillou Bay, but no oil was seen in Sister Lake. Robert Caballero stated that oyster dredge samples taken on March 19th in Sister Lake had low mortality rates. Robert Caballero stated that during the 3 days Sister Lake was open 2,086 sack were harvested from 40 vessels on 76 trips.

Jakov Jurisic asked how LDWF will determine the future effects of this oil spill on oyster recruitment.

Robert Caballero stated that monthly monitoring of Sister Lake would show any recruitment or mortality events. Robert Caballero stated that on March 19th their sampling showed only 11% mortality of spat from fall recruitment and 4% mortality of seed which was typical.

Al Sunseri asked if the Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy is releasing any reports on the oil spill.

Kyle Balkum stated he would have to check on that with permitting and compliance.

Al Sunseri asked to see the report at the next meeting, so they can determine the amount of oil spilled and how to move forward with remediation. Al Sunseri asked LDWF to put a report on landings from previous years to estimate the financial impact of the disaster. Al Sunseri stated that Sister Lake should be reopened since the oil spill closure ruined the timing of its opening.

Brad Robin stated that if any dispersant was sprayed offshore during the oil spill it would come inshore.

Mitch Jurisich stated that media coverage has been relatively low during the oil spill and wants the media to know the real extent of this oil spill.

Patrick Banks stated that the OTF should send their questions to the Louisiana Oil Spill Coordinator's Office (LOSCO).

Kyle Balkum stated that LOSCO is under Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy and they would help in contacting them for the OTF.

Brandon Hebert stated that a landings report from LDWF would be important because sales of oyster are low at the moment.

Mitch Jurisich stated that even though the oil spill was isolated to a small group of parishes this oil spill has had an effect on the sale of oyster thought the whole coast of Louisiana.

Brandon Hebert stated that there is a lot of oil in the grass and around St. Ann Canal. Brandon Hebert stated that biologist noticed a heavy presence of oil that spread with winds and tides. Brandon Hebert stated that there was oil underwater at the bottom of boat launches.

Mitch Jurisich stated the heaviness of the oil allowed it to sink to the bottom and fisherman will not know true impact until they start fishing.

Brandon Hebert stated that oyster fisherman are ready to harvest but the costumers want to wait.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the water might show a presence of an oil sheen again once water temperatures rise.

Jakov Jurisic stated that he suspects that dispersants were used this oil spill based on the oil sinking to the bottom.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the consistency of the oil is closer to grease than that of a regular oil which floats on water. Mitch Jurisich stated that he is concerned about boats not being properly cleaned before going in and out of the spill areas.

Andre Boudreaux stated that uncleaned boats are tracking oil into untouched areas.

Mitch Jurisich stated this oil spill is not being documented properly like with the BP oil spill.

Andre Boudreaux asked if boats were cleaned in designated areas before going out in BP.

Mitch Jurisich stated that boats had to be cleaned prior to going out.

Brandon Hebert stated the decontamination is taking place North of where the oyster are now.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the actual amount of oil spilled needs to be recorded. Mitch Jurisich stated that it seems like the oyster harvester areas were opened earlier than expected. Mitch Jurisich stated the safety of the consumer is their first priority and does not want oysters with an oily quality to reach the consumer.

Al Suneri stated that at this time people are not able to sell their oysters in reopened areas so Sister Lake should be opened later in the year.

Al Suneri motioned to reopen Sister Lake for the fall 2026 Oyster season. 2nd by Shane Bagala.

Mitch Jurisich opened the floor for discussion.

Shane Bagala stated that Prestige Oysters will not buy oysters right now from the areas where oil was present.

Mitch Jurisich stated that even if areas were reopened no one would buy the oysters until there is no visual presence of oil in the water.

Brad Robin stated that it will take a while before consumers are convinced that oysters are safe to eat. Brad Robin stated that only one contaminated oyster has to reach the consumer for there to be a problem.

Mitch Jurisich asked if LDH and LDWF will stay up to date on complaints of oil in oysters.

Jennifer Armentor stated that an oil presence needs to be reported through the proper channels to be investigated. Jennifer Armentor stated that unrelated oil spills could cause oil to appear in oysters.

Mitch Jurisich stated that they should stay in contact with LOSCO with Kyle Balkum as their point of contact.

Al Suneri motioned to reopen Sister Lake for the fall 2026 Oyster season. 2nd by Shane Bagala. Motion carries.

C. To Hear an Update on Current Legislative Bills - OTF

Mitch Jurisich stated **HB 889** by Rep. Orgeron relative to bulk tagging passed the house and is pending senate approval; **HB 669** by Rep. Orgeron relative to the Grand Isle AOC park expansion also passed the house and is pending senate approval; **HB 588** by Rep. Domangue relative to adding a member from the oyster industry to the Seafood Safety taskforce passed the house and is pending senate approval; **HB 652** by Rep. Braud relative to adding a nonvoting member to the OTF from the Department of Forestry and Agriculture passed the house and is pending senate approval; **HB 653** by Rep. Bayham relative to requiring one of the members serving on the OTF from the United Commercial Fisherman's association has to be from St. Bernard Parish passed the house and is pending senate approval.

Mitch Jurisich stated that **HB 770** by Rep. Orgeron relative to decreasing oyster lease terms was voluntarily deferred at the house natural resources committee session. Mitch Jurisich stated that HB770 should have been withdrawn, but appreciates the amount of fisherman who shown up to oppose HB770. Mitch Jurisich stated that they need to be prepared for when HB770 is discussed again by the natural resources committee.

Al Suneri asked for clarification on what HB 653 meant in terms of OTF membership.

Mitch Jurisich stated that membership would still have the same number of members but one of the two members from the United Commercial Fisherman's association would have to be a resident of St. Bernard Parish. Mitch Jurisich stated that at the moment, one member is from St. Bernard and another is from Plaquemines Parish. Mitch Jurisich stated that the additional requirement was a

total amendment to the original HB 653 which only wanted to add two members from the Department of Agriculture to the OTF. Mitch Jurisich stated that there is no problem getting a member from St. Bernard to fill that position, but it is harder to fill OTF positions once there is a residency requirement

Brad Robin stated he was impressed with the turnout at the capital to oppose HB 770. Brad Robin stated that they represented the oyster industry well by showing how crucial private lease clutch is in building oyster habitat.

D. To Discuss a Requirement for Oyster Task Force Approval for Legislative Bills Relating to the Oyster Task Force - OTF

Mitch Jurisich stated that bills pertaining to the OTF should come before the OTF before they are proposed in the Louisiana State Legislature. Mitch Jurisich stated that the OTF was not aware of the contents of HB 653 by Mike Bayham and he strongly opposed it because it was not brought before them.

Brad Robin stated that he found out about the amendments to HB 653 the day it was introduced to the house natural resources committee. Brad Robin stated that people already serve on the OTF who work in St. Bernard but do not take up residency in that parish. Brad Robin stated that if the amended version of HB 653 was brought to the OTF they could have explained why the bill was not necessary.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the OTF meets once a month which should give ample time to legislators to present their bills to the OTF that would change the makeup of its membership.

Al Suneri stated there is not much the OTF can do to prevent this from happening in the future. Al Suneri stated that anyone that wants to make changes should be more transparent with the OTF.

E. To Discuss Updating the Harvester License Training to Reflect Current Time and Temperature Regulations – OTF

Robert Caballero stated that the time and temperature regulations were fixed to the current standards. Robert Caballero stated that LDWF is working on a comprehensive review of the harvester training program videos which were recorded 10 years ago. Robert Caballero stated that updates were made to the website to show current regulations under the harvester training video link. Robert Caballero stated that temporary update slides have been added before and after each video. Robert Caballero stated that updates included no selling of oysters with a fresh products license, requirement of public seed ground vessel permit and gear license, no oyster harvest in Sabine, and the current time and temperature regulations as effective on 12/16/2025.

F. To Discuss Oyster Processors Culling Oyster Onshore.

Al Suneri asked if processing oyster shellstock on shore required a certified oyster processing facility.

Jennifer Armentor stated in some cases of aquaculture farming, the oysters are packed at a farm and immediately shipped out at the proper temperatures without having to be processed in a facility. Jennifer Armentor stated that hotshot oyster are shipped so fast there is no need for a

building so they do inspections of the trucks to make sure they are at the right temperatures and up to their standards.

Mitch Jurisich stated that undersized oyster are brought back to the water after sorting at the dock and have the potential to mix with harvestable oysters.

Al Suneri asked if a processing facility is needed if someone was to buy shellstock from a boat and handled it on their own.

Jennifer Armentor stated that they would need to have a permit and everyone that is a dealer is a certified processor.

Al Suneri stated that he is unfamiliar with any shellstock processors that operate without a facility based on the National Shellfish Sanitation Program regulations.

Jennifer Armentor stated at the Grand Isle facility tumbling workstation are allowed to operate onshore but the oysters have to be returned to the water for 2 weeks.

Al Suneri asked if other oysters at the farm can be harvested in those 2 week.

Jennifer Armentor stated as long as the oyster were in the water for 2 weeks they can be harvested.

Mitch Jurisich asked if not ready for harvest oysters are placed next to a string of harvestable oysters can those harvestable oyster go out to market.

Jennifer Armentor stated those oyster can be harvested because pathogens are not a concern; just the time temperature has been exceeded. Jennifer Armentor stated that an FDA study showed AOC oysters can be out of the water for 24 hours as long as they are returned to the water for 14 consecutive days.

Al Suneri stated that oysters mishandled on unclean surfaces have a chance of contaminating marketable oyster if those mishandled oysters are placed next to them.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the Grand Isle AOC facility is design specifically for AOC processing and does not see any issues arising from mishandling at the facility.

Jennifer Armentor stated that a certified dealer must be present at the AOC Park.

Al Suneri stated that regardless if they are a certified dealers they are not following oyster processing protocol. Al Suneri stated that LDWF can make an exemptions but it does not seem like dealers are following proper food safety regulations. Al Suneri stated that LDWF does not do enforcement on shore.

LT. Davis Madera stated that enforcement is unable to tell if oyster have been in the water for 14 days after processing.

Al Suneri stated that no other gulf state allows oyster processing outside of a certified facility.

Jennifer Armentor stated Texas and Florida have open facilities that are a docks. Jennifer Armentor stated that the tumbling log shows how many cages are in each line, the date and time collected, the tumbling start and end time, and the time they are returned. Jennifer Armentor stated this log proves when each line is ready for harvest.

Al Suneri stated that he is still concerned about the proximity of the returned oyster to the ones that are ready for market on these small AOC farms.

Jennifer Armentor stated that what AOC farms are doing is not an oyster relay.

Al Suneri stated that it is a relay based on how AOC farms operate and the amount of time the oysters are out of the water.

Brad Robin stated that when oysters are moved traditional oystermen have to mark off the area and wait 14 days. Brad Robin asked what is required for an individual to work shellshock.

Jennifer Armentor stated applications and permits are filled with LDH and not every certified dealer approved has a facility.

Brad Robin stated that a vehicle should not be certified as a processors as it could be unsanitary.

Jennifer Armentor stated some docks are only a holding facility for oysters where no sorting takes place.

Brad Robin asked if a certified dealer would need a facility if the oyster were being processed into boxes or sacks.

Jennifer Armentor stated that they would need a facility. Jennifer Armentor stated that the Grand Isle Port Commission facility itself cannot be a certified dealer because it technically not a dealer. Jennifer Armentor stated the individual farmers working at the facility are certified dealers. Jennifer Armentor stated that the facility would allow those dealers to process oysters on land on a shared tumbler and not have to invest in individual tumblers on their boats.

Mitch Jurisich asked if individuals with tumbling stations are being inspected.

Jennifer Armentor stated that those facilities would not be inspected but they would still follow their operation plan.

Al Suneri stated that there need to be higher standards and more inspections of open air tumbling stations.

Brad Robin stated that everyone should follow the same standards when it comes to handling oysters.

LT. Davis Madera stated that according to Title 76 AOC have to abide by the same regulation as on bottom fisheries. LT. Davis Madera stated the AOC is a new industry so it may not be practical for some regulations to apply to them. LT. Davis Madera stated that it may not be enforceable to

monitor from the grounds to the dock because LDWF does not have dominion over the processing facility which is handled by LDH.

Brandon Hebert asked if traditional oyster men making mini sack out regular sacks can use the same type of facility that AOC is using.

Jennifer Armentor stated that it would be legal but AOC oysters cannot be taken on shore without a tag. Jennifer Armentor stated that AOC oysters going to market need to be tagged before being tumbled which causes problems when the oyster are sacked after tumbling. Jennifer Armentor stated bulking tagging would allow multiple sacks to go under one bulk tag making it easier to keep track of the oyster after resacking.

Jennifer Armentor stated the initial intent of the facility was an open air workstation where AOC oysters could be worked and returned to the water. Jennifer Armentor stated that the farmers wanted to process oyster for market so walls had to be installed.

Al Suneri stated that the upgrades make him more comfortable with it operating as an oyster processing facility.

Shane Bagala asked if legislation should be passed concerning treating processed AOC oysters as relay oysters.

Mitch Jurisich stated that it would be highly unlikely because AOC farms are small and they would not be able to separate the oysters from ready to harvest oysters.

G. To discuss appointing a member from the Louisiana Oyster Dealers and Growers Association to the OTF

Mitch Jurisich stated that Jody Johnson is the nominee from the Dealers and Growers Association and his letter of nomination would be sent the LDWF for approval.

VII. Public Comment

A member of the audience asked why AOC oysters were being put back into the water after they have been landed.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the oysters are brought back to the water after being tumbled to achieve a rounder shape to the oyster.

Jennifer Armentor stated that tumbling also sorts the oysters so there are uniform sizes in each line.

Another member of the audience stated that dispersant may have been used for the loop oil spill because the oil on his lease had similar qualities to the BP oil spill.

Brandon Hebert asked who they should contact if they sees oil present in the water.

Jennifer Armentor stated that they should call it in and LOSCO will investigate the claim.

Brandon Hebert stated that oil is still present in some areas despite harvest areas being open.

Brian Warren stated that their sampling showed the oyster meat is not affected in areas where oil was originally reported in the water.

A member of the audience asked when HB 770 would likely come up again at legislation.

Mitch Jurisich stated that they are not sure but everyone needs to be ready to oppose it when it come back up at the capital.

VIII. The next meeting set for Tuesday, May 19, 2026 10:00am at the New Orleans Lakefront Airport.

IX. Brad Robin motioned to adjourn, 2nd by Jakov Jurisic. Motion carries